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ABSTRACT

Reduction of cafeteria overcrowding was one of the tasks facing the new administration at Muir Elementary School in Long Beach (California). More than 90 percent of the 950 students were being served during one recess of 65 minutes in a cafeteria seating approximately 300 persons. A problem-solving team consisting of the principal, program facilitator, counselor, representative of the teachers' group, community worker, and school clerk discussed and verified the existing conditions and reached consensus on the desired conditions. The planning team's next activity was identifying constraints to possible solutions and soliciting ideas from administrators, teachers, students, and a review of the literature. Several plans were developed and presented to the faculty, parents, support services, and classified staff for reactions. After a field test, a satisfactory solution to the problem was reached: more garbage cans were placed in the cafeteria during the noon recesses; garbage disposal was installed; and the schedule changed to two noon recesses of 40 minutes each, two staggered intervals of 10-minutes each and a 10-minute break between recesses. A bibliography and the adopted schedule conclude the report. (Author/MLF)

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A PARTICIPATIVE MANAGEMENT APPROACH TO THE REVISION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A LUNCH SCHEDULE IN AN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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Problem Area and Its Importance

Reduction of overcrowding in the cafeteria was one of the most difficult tasks facing the new administration at Muir Elementary School. The cafeteria seated approximately 300 students during one noon recess. With the school participating in the Federal and State low-cost lunch program for low-income families, more than 90% of the 950 youngsters were being served during one recess of 65 minutes. The lunch schedule had not been updated to accomodate the sudden increase of students depending on the limited cafeteria facilities and small food service staff for their noon meal. The administrators were under pressure from parents, students, and staff to provide better cafeteria services during the lunch hour. The purpose of this paper was to examine the problem area as it was stated in the following question:

How can Muir Elementary School administrative staff revise and implement a schedule in such a manner that it reduces overcrowding in the cafeteria during the noon recess?

The problem solving model was used as the theoretical framework of this investigation.[1]

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[1]Thomas W. Fine, Guide to Educational Problem Solving (La Verne, California: La Verne College, 1976).

Current and Historical Background

Muir Elementary School is located on the west side of the city of Long Beach, California. The community has the characteristics of both urban and suburban areas. The school community was comprised of mostly single-family homes with some apartment complexes located along the main streets. During the early 1960s, the community was a predominantly white middle class area. However, during the 1970s, the community has undergone some changes and was generally considered a multi-racial neighborhood. The racial ethnic composition of the student population was as follows: Blacks, 50.8%; Oriental, 3.6%; other Asians, 11.6%; Spanish surname, 12.3%; White, 21.8%.[1]

The socioeconomic level of the community was a combination of skilled, semiskilled and unskilled workers. A significant number of households were headed by working mothers. Although the student body consisted of approximately 950 youngsters, less than one-fourth of the families resided in the apartments.

The instructional program consisted of 31 classes from kindergarten through sixth grade. Each grade level included four or five teachers. In addition to the teaching staff, the educational program was comprised of the principal,

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[1]Long Beach Unified School District, Comprehensive School-Level Program, EDY-SB90 and ECE Plan (Long Beach, Calif.: Long Beach Unified School District, 1976-77), p. 5.

teacher/specialist, two program facilitators, a nurse and a counselor. Other itinerant personnel in various programs and a parttime program specialist (vice principal) completed the group. The office staff was comprised of a secretary, clerks and a few educational aide and other classified personnel.

Definition of Terms

Federal and state low-cost lunch program. The Food and Nutrition Service was the Agency of the Department of Agriculture that administers the program to make food assistance available to people who need it. The programs operated in cooperation with state and local governments. This program was established on August 8, 1969, by the Secretary of Agriculture. Muir School community is composed of low-income and needy families.[1]

Free or reduced-price lunches. The National School Lunch Program provided financial assistance to public and nonprofit private schools for high school grades and under in operating nonprofit lunch programs. These funds were provided to the schools on the basis of their performance with special emphasis on extending the program to make meals available to all children, and to serve meals free or at reduced prices to children from needy families.[2]

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[1]U.S. Government Manual 1976-77 (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Services, General Services Administration, rev. May, 1976).

[2]Ibid.

Lunch line. Students moving in a single file through the cafeteria serving area, paying the cashier and picking up hot lunches.

Noon recess. A period of time during the middle of the school day designated for the students and staff to eat a midday meal. The time was generally between 11:25 and 1:15 o'clock.

Staggered intervals. The scheduling of classes to enter the cafeteria in overlapping shifts.

Transiency rate. A ratio determined by the total accumulative enrollment minus the average daily enrollment over the average daily enrollment. The formula was as follows:

$$\text{Transiency} = \frac{\text{Total Accumulative Enrollment} - \text{Average Daily Enrollment}}{\text{Average Daily Enrollment}}$$ [1]

The Problem-Solving Team and Problem Definition

Problem-Solving Team

The problem-solving team was comprised of the principal, program facilitator, counselor, representative of the teachers' group, community worker, and school clerk. The program specialist (vice principal) served as coordinator of the team.

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[1] L.B. Unified School District, p. 5.

Problem Definition

Although the team had discussed the existing conditions during its earlier meetings, it recognized that a more concentrated study of these conditions was necessary. The existing conditions were verified through observation, discussion, and participation by the team members during the noon recess over a four-week period. An additional four-week period was needed to obtain written consensus on the desired conditions. The statement of the problem is reinterated here:

> Problem: How can Muir Elementary School Administrative staff revise and implement a schedule in such a manner that it reduces overcrowding in the cafeteria during the noon recess?

Existing Conditions		Desired Conditions
One noon recess of 65 minutes was provided in the Instructional Program for serving 600+ students and staff in the cafeteria that was designed for approximately 300.	(1)	Modify and revise the Instructional Program to allot sufficient time and flexibility in scheduling students and staff for lunch in the cafeteria.
Grades 1 and 2 were the first to enter the lunch line, had difficulty carrying their trays, and tended to slow the flow of older students through the serving area.	(2)	Implement a trial period of several weeks allowing other grades to be first in the lunch line.
Both students and staff had a 40-minute noon recess.	(3)	Continue with the 40-minute noon recess for staff and students.
The scheduled staggered time intervals of 5 to 10 minutes for the intermediate grades caused confusion and conflict among the students	(4)	Adjust the staggered time intervals for the intermediate grades and share this information with the noon aides.

Existing Conditions (cont.)		Desired Conditions (cont.)
and noon aides supervising the lunch line.		
During the height of the noon recess, there was an overflow of students and not enough seats in the cafeteria.	(5)	Formulate plans for including the problem of student overflow and lack of seats in the revision of the schedule.
An inadequate supply of garbage cans, a worn-out garbage disposal, and a lack of janitorial services during the noon recess contributed to long lines of students waiting to empty trays before leaving the cafeteria.	(6)	Provide a sufficient number of garbage cans until the district installs the commercial garbage disposal that has been approved for installation in the 1976-77 school year and assign personnel to remove and replace the cans at intervals during the noon recess.

Solution Criteria and Constraints

Solution Criteria

The planning team's next activity was to focus its attention on establishing the criteria to be used in seeking out and examining a variety of solution strategies. One of its tasks was the assignment of the desired conditions into categories of Musts and Shoulds. The desired conditions were then rewritten as solution criteria.

The solution strategies selected to revise and implement a schedule in such a manner that it reduced overcrowding in the cafeteria during the noon recess Must:

1. Modify and revise the instructional program to allot sufficient time and flexibility in scheduling students and staff for lunch.

2. Implement a trial period of several weeks for

other grades to be first in the lunch line.

3. Continue with the 40-minute noon recess for staff and students.

4. Provide a sufficient number of garbage cans and assign personnel to remove and replace them at specified times during the noon recess.

5. Contact the district office regarding the installation of the commercial garbage disposal that has been approved to replace the one that is worn out. This should be done prior to January 1.

The solution strategies selected as Should:

1. Adjust the staggered time intervals for the intermediate grades and share this information with the aides who are on supervision. This problem should be considered in the revision of the schedule.

2. Formulate plans for including the problem of student overflow and lack of seating space in the revision of schedule.

Constraints

The planning team identified five constraints that were considered in the selection of solution strategies:

1. The revised schedule complied with the basic regulations governing elementary school schedules in the Long Beach Unified School District.[1]

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[1]Long Beach Unified School District, Time Allotment and Outline of the Curriculum and Instruction (Long Beach,

2. Special funded programs such as those for Educationally Disadvantaged Youth (EDY-SB90) and Early Childhood Education employed instructional aides to serve three hours per day during the instructional programs only. Teachers having aides objected to changes that may interfere with their aide time.

3. Several of the noon aides who supervised the students during the noon recess were hired for one hour per day.

4. The specialists in music, speech, and media services were assigned to more than one school and planned their schedules in such a manner that they served schools in all parts of the district.

5. The program specialist coordinating the efforts served Muir Elementary School only three days a week (Monday-Wednesday).

Fiscal constraints were not a problem since the proposed schedule replaced one that was in operation. Rescheduling of part-time noon aides did not involve making changes in the present budget.

Survey and Selection of Solution Alternatives

Survey of Solution Sources

The five most valuable sources of information were elementary and junior high school administrators, elementary and junior high school students, teachers (K-9), observations

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Calif.: L.B. Unified School District, 1970).

of cafeteria operations, and a survey of the literature.

The administrators discussed their particular lunch programs; ways of improving the cafeteria situation at their sites and suggested change that may be useful at the district level. Several persons in this group had similar problems.

An informal survey of students at the elementary and junior high school level revealed that many students were concerned about the food and operation of their cafeterias. They voiced both their likes and dislikes about the schedule. A common complaint was that the lunch period was too short.

Teachers new to Muir School who had taught at other elementary and/or junior high school sites shared their experiences and described their previous lunch programs.

The observation of cafeteria personnel and students during the noon recess was an opportunity to see the human side of scheduling. The speed necessary for the personnel to serve a large number of students in such a short time took a considerable amount of organization and planning.

A survey of the literature showed that scheduling was a mammoth job. Lunch schedules were important parts of the curriculum. According to Saville:

> Schools with cafeterias large enough to function with one lunch hour have little concern with schedule conflicts. However, when two to five lunch hours are necessary, these "waves" must be incorporated into the instructional program.[1]

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[1]Anthony Saville, "Programming Advice for the School Schedule," The Clearing House, 48(9) (May 1974), 547-551.

Literature containing information pertaining to school scheduling was useful in determining the selection of solution alternatives. References found to be helpful were:

Anderson, Lester W., and Lauren A. Van Dyke. Secondary School Administration. Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1972.

California State Department of Education. Comprehensive School-Level Program Plan, 1976-77. Sacramento, Calif.: State Department of Education, 1970.

Saville, Anthony. "Programming Advice for the School Schedule," The Clearing House, 48(9) (May 1974), 547-551.

Selection of Solution Alternatives

In generating solution alternatives, the planning team used the district's approved publications on curricular areas and elementary schedules as guides. The team agreed that several plans should be developed and presented to the faculty, parents, support services, and classified staff for reactions. Small group meetings were held with the teachers by grade levels. In most instances, the grade level chairperson volunteered to co-chair the brainstorming session. The classified staff was informed individually. Parents were contacted by phone, newsletters, and bulletins. The supervisor of the food services division for the Muir School area and a curriculum supervisor were consulted. As a result, the team gave consideration to the following solution alternatives:

1. That the present schedule be re-examined to

determine if there was time available that could be converted into a noon recess for some classes who may have music, physical education, or library time just before lunch. These classes could schedule those subjects at some other time during the day or week.

2. That the present schedule be retained but reversed the order of grades going to lunch. Beginning with sixth grade, students would go to the cafeteria by room numbers at five minute intervals until all rooms had been served. The rationale for this plan was offered as follows: (a) Muir is so large that all the students in a certain grade were not housed in the same building. Many children were not acquainted with other children in the same grade. Students choose their friends from among the children they see in their building or on their halls. (b) Cross-grade teaming was possible when the teachers shared the same recesses and noon hour.

3. That the instructional program be revised to include two noon recesses of 40 minutes each, two staggered intervals of 10 minutes each, and a 10-minute break between the first and second recess. Total noon recess time, 110 minutes. The first recess should be for Grades 1-3. Grade 3 would be the first group to enter the lunch line. Grades 2 and 1 would follow at 5-minute intervals respectively. The second recess should be for the 4-6 grade rooms. The 10-minute staggered interval applied to those rooms on the first and second floors of the main building.

4. That the instructional program be revised to include three noon recesses of 30 minutes each: a 10-minute break between the first and second recess, and a 15-minute break between the second and third recess. Total noon recess time 115 minutes. First recess should be for Grades 5 and 6. The second noon recess should be for Grades 3 and 4. The third noon recess should be for Grades 1 and 2. The rationale given for this schedule was as follows: (a) Grades 1, 2, and 3 were on split sessions. This allowed students to have more instructional time before lunch. (b) Some of the primary classes had two aides in the mornings only. Such a schedule allowed the aides the maximum number of hours with the students.

5. That the program specialist informed the head caretaker that more garbage cans were needed in the cafeteria during the noon recess. Asked him to assign one of his men to the cafeteria area at noon time. Specified that he was needed to remove and replace the cans as they became full and cleaned up any food spills in the cafeteria.

6. That the principal or his/her designate contacted the appropriate office regarding the immediate installation of the commercial garbage disposal. This was done before January 1.

7. That the instructional program be revised to include one noon recess of 40 minutes and five staggered intervals of 12 minutes each. Total noon recess time 100 minutes.

The planning team discussed each solution alternative and compared it with the previously established solution criteria. After several conferences the group agreed that the following three solution alternatives should be considered for field testing immediately:

#3. Two noon recesses of 40 minutes each, two staggered intervals of 10 minutes each and a 10-minute break between the recesses. Total noon time 110 minutes.

#5. More garbage cans for cafeteria during noon recesses.

#6. Contact the district office regarding installation of the commercial garbage disposal.

The planning team was informed that solution alternative #5 had been corrected. A few days later the district office had assured the cafeteria supervisor that the request for replacing the worn-out garbage disposal (solution alternative #6) with a commercial one was receiving priority.

Solution alternative #3 was considered the most important of the three plans. A detailed schedule was prepared and presented to the teachers and classified staff. Copies of the schedule were sent to the parents. Both parents and teachers were asked to discuss the schedule with the children. A copy of the completely revised schedule is included in the Appendix.

Field Test Plan

Field Test Plan Implementation

The field test was planned for a one week period. A series of meetings was held with the staff prior to the field test date. Parents were contacted by phone, bulletins, parent-school organizations, and newsletters. The schedule with a letter attached t it was sent to the parents. The letter contained a brief statement of the reason for changing the schedule at this time. The following Thursday, a second announcement of the pending changes in the schedule was sent to the parents.

During the following week, the planning team observed the program very closely and was available to assist the students as needed. A few minor corrections were necessary during the first two days. However, about the third day, the students seemed to be adjusted to the schedule. By the fifth day, the students and staff had made the transition smoothly in the short time of one week.

Adopt, Modify, or Reject Solution

The planning team made an informal survey of the students and staff. The responses were favorable. The most complimentary group of employees were the food service staff and noon aide supervisors. The comments include the following:

"The children are not in a hurry to eat and run."

"The cafeteria is not as noisy as it used to be."

"The ten-minute break between recesses gives us time to refill the steam tables and clean the tables without rushing. The kids aren't from wall to wall."

Comments from the support service staff were that we can have a lunch recess at a reasonable time.

Solution alternative #3 had met the solution criteria that were established.

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APPENDIX

SCHEDULES FOR EACH GRADE

1-6

Time Allotment: Openings

Dismissals

Recesses

Final Lunch Schedule

FINAL SCHEDULE

Desired Schedules

Kindergarten remains the same.

	Openings	Regular Dismissals	1st Day of Wk. Dismissals
Kdgn - - -	Remain the same		
Reg. Grade 1 & 2	8:30	2:20	2:20
*Minimum Day 1st, 2nd, 3rd	8:30	1:30	
Grade 2	8:30	1:30	1:30
Split Session	9:40	2:45	2:20
Grade 3	8:30	2:20	2:00
Split Session	9:40	3:10	2:10
Grade 4, 5, 6	9:00	3:10	2:10
*Minimum Day 4th, 5th, 6th	9:00	1:50	

Lunch Schedule

See Attached Page

No afternoon recess on shortened day schedule.

Recesses

Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
9:30	9:30	9:30
10:40	10:40	10:40
1:15	1:15	1:15

FINAL

Lunch Schedules

Proposal - Two Noon Schedules

Rationale - Overcrowding condition in the cafeteria on present schedule.

1.	Grade 1	11:25 - 12:05	40 min. each plus 10 min. passing time
	Grade 2	11:30 - 12:10	
	Grade 3	11:35 - 12:15	
	Dead Time	12:15 - 12:25	10 min.
2.	Grade 4	12:25 - 1:05	40 min. each plus 10 min. passing time
	Rooms 16,18,19,20	12:30 - 1:10	
	Rooms 12,13,14,15,34	12:35 - 1:15	
Total Noon Time			110 minutes

Bells:

1st recess: A bell will ring at 11:25 and 12:05 respectively.

2nd recess: A bell will ring at 12:25 and 1:15.